

THE SKY

IS

LEADEN

IN THE SOUTH

AN EVOCATION THROUGH GREY

13 March – 25 April 2020

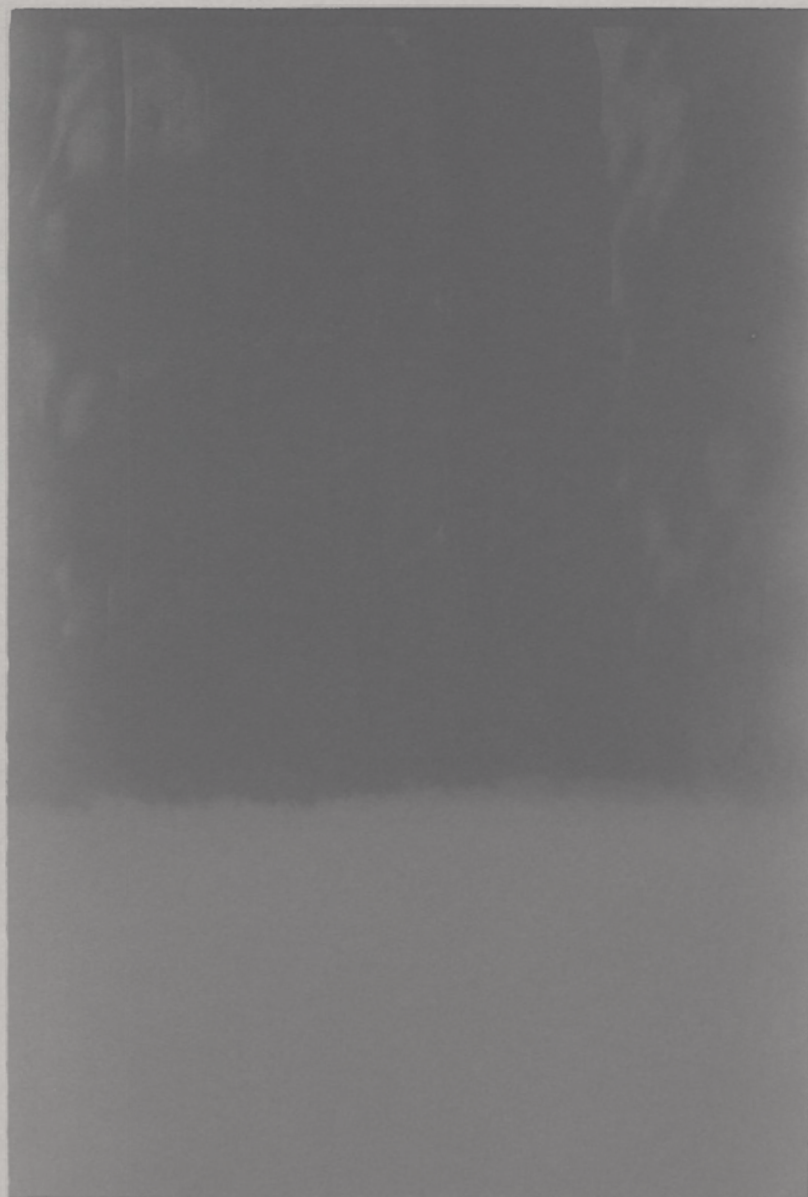
Andrea Büttner
Helen Cammock
Lubaina Himid
Ellen Lesperance
Liliana Moro
Ruth Proctor
Charlotte Prodger
Lis Rhodes

A series of place holders, notes, frames of reference. As much as wanting to escape them, we are in them.

This grey show is getting nowhere, the foggy downtrodden time between thinking and feeling, thinking and reeling, the nothingness that an impasse brings. I'm stuck, so stuck – mud glue of emotion.

Grey is a colour
a space
an idea

Grey is an experience. Grey is the colour of war and the colour of industry. It is the colour of the photographic age. Grey is the sky, the sea, the weather, the flickering of shadow. The secret space in-between that holds everything and nothing. Arguably grey is the space of thought, it is never one thing or another – constantly shifting – no one person sees the same grey. If you begin to describe a grey day, you end up with a myriad of colour and light schemes that determine and fix what is beneath.

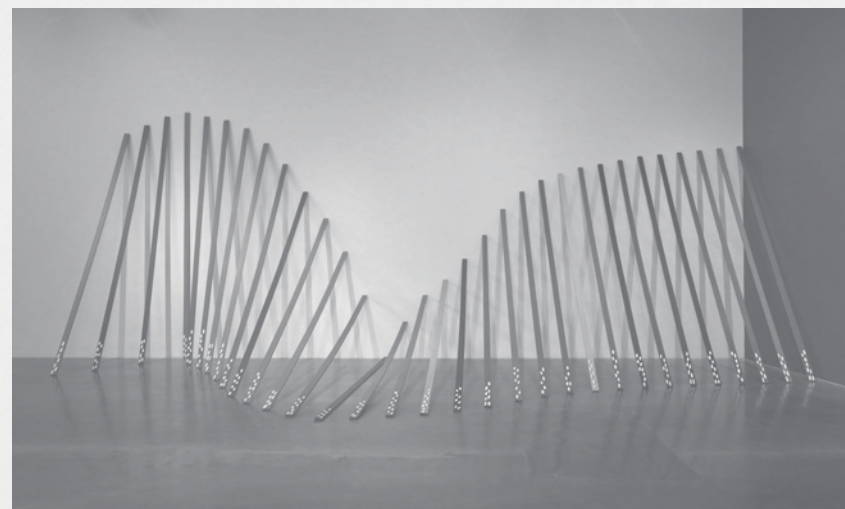


1996, MUSEUM FÜR MODERNE KUNST
FRANKFURT, GERMANY

I'm a student and in a room alone. On the walls is *October 18, 1977* (1988), a painting cycle by Gerhard Richter. It is the first time I have encountered his paintings in real space and time. I am silenced and amazed by them, they reverberate around me, I didn't expect this and it destabilises me. The blur of edge, the smooth perfection of one thing to another filters the experience of looking into an experience of being. I am fascinated by Ulrike Meinhof, her dead body painted three times and painted lying parallel to the image plane, as if on a *predella*.¹ The space between the index (photograph) and the work feeling vast; retaining its likeness an expanse communicated by a palette of grey, but also by the blurring and nearing of painting across the three versions, and the angle adjusted only slightly.

I

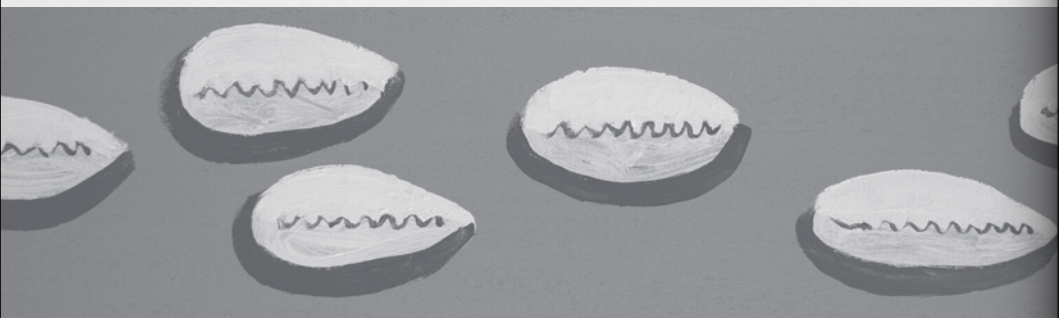
feel the effect
to and fro
towards death



Lubaina Himid, *Old Boat/New Money*, 2019
32 planks, painted wood

1. *Predella* is an Italian term for the long horizontal structure at the base or 'foot' of an altarpiece. Such structures are usually painted with narrative scenes which are related to, or expand upon, the subject of the larger images above. Definition supplied by The National Gallery, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/predellas>





Lubaina Himid, *Old Boat/New Money*, 2019 [detail]

The labour of the mind is edged with circumstance, the delicate separation between our bodies and event sliced thin. Our lives fill gallery walls, often appropriated and mostly threaded via an intangible set of knots that hide our happiness and pain. Sometimes this froths forth, but politeness, etiquette and emotional illiteracy keep us quiet and keep us down.

The sky is leaden in the south: an evocation through grey encounters the space between artwork and artwork. It is a trail through the lens of the conflicted and problematic; 'I', a reflection that probes a dialogical space where contingency of meaning, emotion and the fleeting coalesce.

18 APRIL 2019, 11 AM, PORTHMEOR STUDIOS
ST IVES, UK

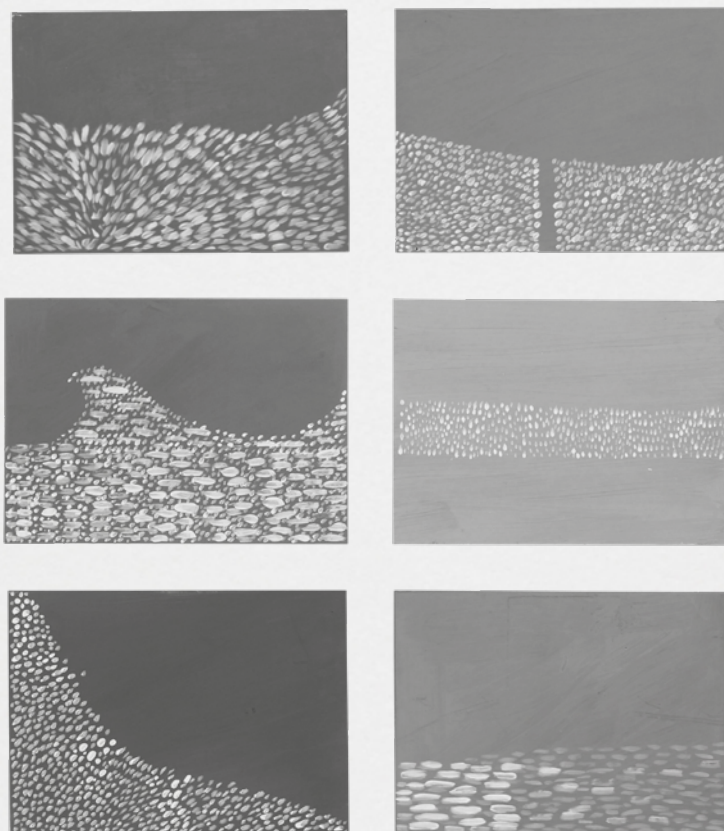
REFERENCE 1: SOCIAL PAIN AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Old Boat/New Money (OBNM; 2019) was made in St Ives at Porthmeor Studios. A large-scale installation of 32 paintings on wood/32 colours of grey. The work stretched the entire wall, the light was north-facing and skylit in an otherwise windowless space. The pale greys of the early spring sun reflected in the swoop and wave of the paintings. Himid hadn't wanted a view, too distracting, too seductive. The sea is a recurring motif. St Ives a revisited site for making. Himid was there in the late 90s, then placed in the old lifeguard's hut on the beach, the seascape gaping with its demanding push and pull – a space of danger according to Himid. At the bottom of each painting are Cowrie shells, once currency in parts of western Africa, evoking the exchange of goods for money, people for money.

The shells are placed so that they meander below and above the shoreline, the effect of the water – a seismic ripple that has torn apart our upheld version of the past. The work about voyage was about to go on its own, transferred from studio to museum, from regional curiosity to international urban stage.

25 JUNE 2019, 6 PM, NEW MUSEUM
NEW YORK

OBNM, the sum of its parts have arrived and are now installed on the fourth floor of the New Museum in New York. It is difficult to comprehend this transposition. At Porthmeor the elegiac presence was in full immanence. The New Museum furthered the choreographic unfolding of OBNM, its sound (sound track accompanies the work) a subtle underpinning of the recent and historical time-lapse that the simplicity of the grey-scaled monochromatic planks held.



Lubaina Himid, *Metal Sea Paintings*, 2019
Acrylic on metal

But perhaps, I should be telling you about another work, *Metal Sea Paintings* (2019), a sequence of A6 metal postcards, in grey, first shown at Newlyn Art Gallery, UK, in spring 2019. Hollybush Gardens isn't large enough to host *OBNM*, which is made to the proportions of the airplane hanger scale of the New Museum. The sea is such a decisive element in Himid's oeuvre, it's hard to move between its vastness and domestic scale, even though she has shown us, time and time again, the interconnectedness of the two. In fact, her work is often about the upholding of the privileged English domestic space by imported labour, Black labour, slavery, people transported far away from home – sold to serve, enslaved within a domestic interior space. So, the postcard-sized metal paintings are complicated. Shown down the road from St Ives, in the less grand Newlyn, the image is more resistant to the construct of the seaside as holiday. But the postcard is of course a form that speaks of transit. If Himid's work is a messaging system, then these paintings as post recall not the terror of the sea but the power of the word, sending reassuring messages to family and loved ones, secrets to lovers and gossip to friends. In multiple greys, the simplicity; the coastal pebble formations are depicted flat as pattern with graded colouring. As a sequence there is a filmstrip quality to them. A lot has been written of the relationship between the advent of photography, the moving image and painting. Not long ago, Malin and I sat with Lubaina in her studio and talked about the frame, Édouard Manet and photography, whilst looking at glossy pages of men in magazines. This 'strip' is about a view, and our way into an image, but also an experience – an image constituted by the fragmentary, the impartial, and a glimpse – an inversion of scale. This is a timeline rendered through the slippery pale light of British seaside sun. The painting reminds me of a tiny snapshot detail from an Impressionist painting of the seaside, by Gustave Caillebotte or Berthe Morisot for example. When looking beyond the codes of their era, it is possible to recover something of the radically of their painting, the flow between vision, life and the politics of who, what, when and how.

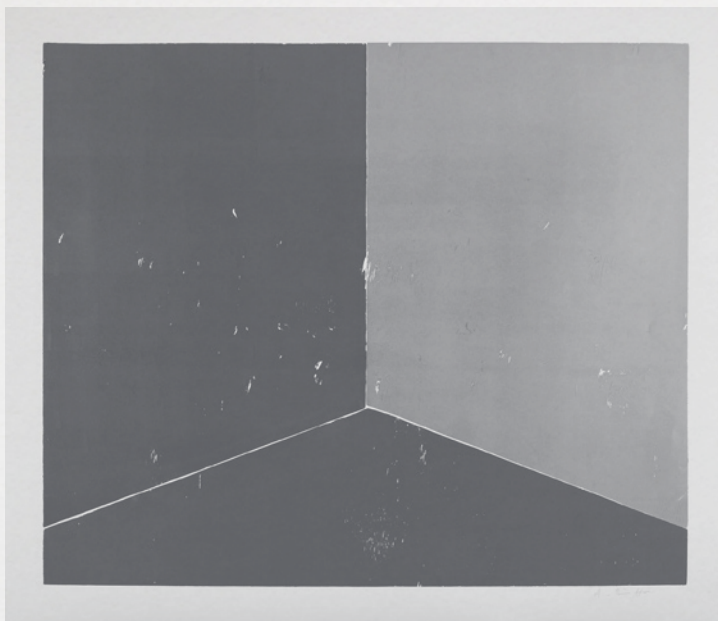
FEBRUARY 2012, HOLLYBUSH GARDENS
BETHNAL GREEN, LONDON, UK

REFERENCE 2: THE CORNER

500 square feet, first floor of a shabby warehouse in Bethnal Green. Basic, with a set of grey metal doors. Antithesis to power, it spoke of studio, of improvisation, of DIY, but it had light, windows that faced west, the face of aspiration, a space of sight. Between 2011 and 2012, Andrea Büttner consolidated some of her thinking into formal shapes; a body of works pivoting around the idea and space of a corner. A print of three different shades of grey was the first corner in *Moos/Moss*, an exhibition held at Hollybush Gardens in February 2012; this corner is shown here again. I have to repeat myself. Except, the motif, the cut pieces of ply of her template, were coloured and printed in consciously countless colours – bright and sombre, all lending themselves to the delineation of an architecture, the seam of paper made visible between ply plates – inserting us into this space. The upside down Y standing in for language; wood print as page, as surface as screen. A junction that leads the trail off the paper; folding energy, activity back onto the object or subject in the room.



Andrea Büttner, *Corner*, 2011–12
Installation view of *Moos/Moss* at Hollybush Gardens



Andrea Büttner, *Corner*, 2011–12
Woodcut on paper

This corner is intended to be about shame, and is often talked about as a space associated with the cruelty of childhood – strict schooling often sent children into a corner. Martin Kippenberger made a self portrait facing a corner, and it is mostly understood that this portrait is a humbling demonstration of shame or penance for bad behaviour. Büttner often cites artworks by others as part of her making, from Giotto and HAP Grieshaber to more recent additions to the European canon. Kippenberger's *Martin, Into the Corner, You Should Be Ashamed of Yourself* (1989) exists in six versions, fewer than Büttner's corner series, but his multiplication compounds the sensation and acts that make us ashamed or shameful. The permutation staged by Büttner asserts a different kind of shame – an inhabited shame that resounds around making art, a constant permeation from which you cannot find relief. Büttner's corner asks something atemporal, an act of the body that extends beyond oneself; deep into culture and thought; into the fabric of life; into the architecture of space. Some people believe that the corner hosts negative emotion and feeling and needs to be cleansed, often with burning sage, although there are many global variations of this ritual.

Büttner's works also bring to mind the colour experiments of Josef Albers – the act of comprehending light and dark colours

that he set for students. This led Albers to the surprising assertion that only a minority of people can read colour density correctly, including among 'advanced' painting students.² Something of this effect occurs with Büttner's *Corner*, the optical offset being that we have difficulty deciphering the intensity of the shade, leading to an abstraction of space. It floats, creating connections between psychic identity and spatial construction, that which Anthony Vidler refers to as 'warped space'.³ His thesis being that it is not only the event, whether collective trauma such as war or personal incidence, that has affected the representation of space in art over time, but that architecture itself has accommodated the reality of human experience.

Like Büttner's beginnings in grey, the referent *Dust Breeding* (1920) is a photograph by Man Ray about layers upon layers – where leaving something alone becomes a space for the possibility of production, production through entropy, through nothing.⁴ Perhaps Büttner was thinking about how doing nothing can lead to thought, or how organic processes need to be left alone to evolve – like moss, another subject of fascination of the artist and shown here in the form of a slide show, inserted into a grey stretched canvas made of cotton drill. This 'work-wear' drill, known for its hard wearing capacity, dissects the 'doing nothing' with 'doing something', an analogy for labour – that of the artist, that of production within the capitalist machine, and that of the idea. The artist as worker is a subject Dieter Roth also interrogated, another figure deeply immersed in feelings of shame. Roth is the other spectre hovering over *Corner*, a figure whose voice has meandered through Büttner's *oeuvre*, through her reading of his diaries and excerpts on shame, and a woodcut depicting the artist.

I think the idea of labour is central to these particular works by Büttner, and the collapse of different forms of labour (artisanal, of the mind, and of industry) into one murky pool augers an 'ethical apocalypse' where empathy has been under existential threat in

2. Joseph Albers, *Interaction of Color* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

3. Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

4. The image is a document of Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass* (1915–1923) after it had collected a year's worth of dust. The photograph was taken with a two-hour-long exposure that captured the complex texture and diversity of materials that accumulated atop the glass surface.

the post-WII condition.⁵ Empathy, the ability to extend one's body's understanding into the realm of the Other is the metronome conditioning both *Corner* and the axis of labour/worker/shame. We are confronted by empathy and a withdrawal of labour of sorts, the artist's own. For unlike previous woodcut works – *Corner* is rendered bare, the print catching the detail of the 'poor' materiality of the ply wood template. The absence of the drawn image can be seen as ambivalent: both a refusal of the image but also a seeing beyond, a seeing into space – encapsulating an emotion, a state, a condition of being – a projected state of the collective psychological space traumatised by individualism like a mottled mirror – what we can see isn't what is there.

AN ASIDE

September 2019 at Hollybush Gardens, Clerkenwell: The vaulted ceiling is painted cobalt blue with potatoes, a take on the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua by Giotto. The transformation of this expensive religious commission into a secular idea by Büttner; elevating the earth upwards is a weighty act of appropriation. Life lines ago, in Padua around 1305, one of the earliest examples of *grisaille* (grey painting) sits beneath Giotto's bright starry sky – his grey fresco cycle representing the life of the Virgin Mary and the life of Christ inhabiting the lowest space in the chapel nestling near the floor. Büttner is also interested in the 'low' and the idea of the fallen. This space in grey perhaps a space of experimentation, of working through.⁶ It is both near and far, the time travelled and the time spent between. I wonder at his use of the marginal spaces at the floor level of the chapel and what was seen and what was not. The stretch of hand desiring and learning as he finds a mode in full view yet hidden. I think about art that has gone before and the challenge to Modernist and/or Postmodernist conditions posed by appropriation and the continued excavation into histories led by a desiring gaze, seeking a contrapuntal understanding of time gone by to disrupt and dispute the inadequacies of the Modernist narrative. In truth appropriation has always been the rhythmic breath of ideas and culture, the register now worn outside not secreted within.

5. Franco Berardi, *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry* (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2018), 136.

6. Frances Guerin, *The Truth is Always Grey: A History of Modernist Painting* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018) 43–48.

I sit in a corner, the wall on the left is of comfort,
a crutch of sorts.



Negronis, wet feet, umbrella stolen.

I am triangulated;

I don't know where to turn or what is real. I am a speck on a horizon – is it boredom, loneliness, or both? I turn my gaze towards the left. I sit here now, in my corner, lines of tongue and grove wooded walls painted shallow white soothe my thoughts. I am the agent of my own becoming. I realise this now, a late developer; emotional stasis is a poisonous thing.

I search for connections, I need to embed myself floating across stone pavements no sanctuary. I'm living close to my limit. No one realises this, and I am the last to know. I take a picture of my closet ally in front of a stone lion relief. It calms me, and so does she. Two lions, the protectorate out in force.

I see faces of joy, disappointment and confusion. The fumes of anticipation that foretell public acknowledgement, money well spent. It is meant to rain but the weather is warm and sunny and instead we burn and dehydrate. For a brief moment there is something bordering on happiness and authenticity. For a brief moment the smiles are real and not secret.

REFERENCE 3: THE FRAME

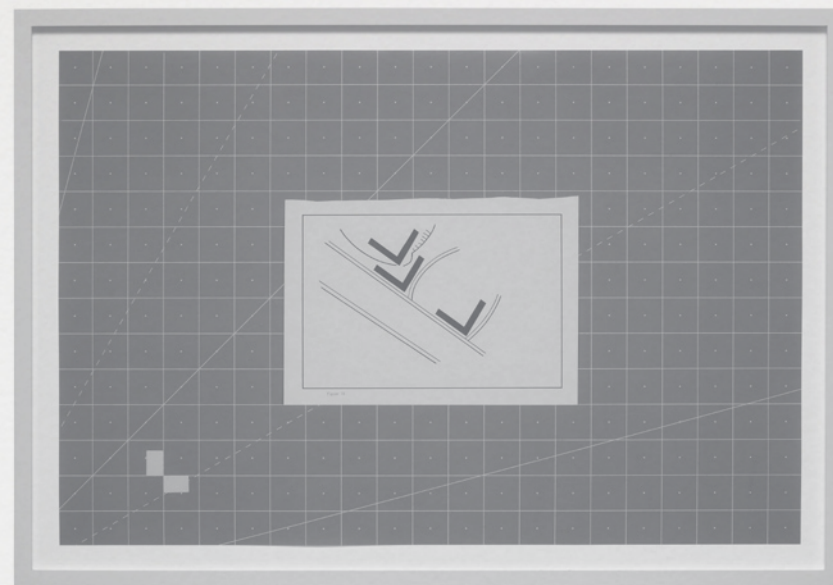
It takes something to lead from this to that, but that is this, and without this the conditions of speaking would be disarmed. Take the armature of imposed space and go with. I am trying to consider the relationship between the formal qualities of a series of photographs by Charlotte Prodger and its referent, the video installation *SaFo5* (2019). In *SaFo5* the pages from a book on Assyrian sculpture are stuck to a window, the artist is caught moving across the frame; at this moment a voiceover catalogues the movements of a rare bearded lioness with the given name *SaFo5*⁷ which Prodger has tried to track, aided by a team of

conservationists in a national park in Botswana. Wait a minute, there are so many layers to this heaped upon one another:

Window	Northern Iraq
SaFos	Sound space
From above	History
Artist	Picture plane
Author	Scale
Triangulation	Pubic hair
Frame	Time Code
Biography	Botswana
Assyria	Drone

The essay 'The Forms of Violence', by Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit from 1979, is supplied by the artist. It is about the frame in Assyrian sculpture. I read it, and realise that what is missing is my understanding of the scale of the referent, the actual Assyrian reliefs themselves. I flick to the website of the British Museum. I am struck by two things: their scale and our nation state built on looting, I think how crazy it is that I can go and look at these things, the paws, the speared line, the cage up close. There are daily tours, I am sure I would learn so much, but I choose instead to pretend they are still in current day northern Iraq, unapproachable for now despite being down the road. I think about the clues supplied and how the series of C-type photograph prints are transposed to another register that continue the disruption of the narrative space beyond the space, into another time-space, a dimension that says something about the speaking and telling of the frame and its disruption, carried on, and imposed upon through its transgression.

7. *SaFos* is named after a maned lioness that figures in the work as a cipher for queer attachment and desire. This animal is the last of several maned lionesses documented in the Okavango Delta and is only known to Prodger through a database of behaviours and camera-trap footage logged across several years. These indexes of *SaFos*'s existence are intersected with autobiographical fragments from Prodger's own life that fluctuate between proximity and distance. Her voiceover traces a chronology of intimate gestures and interpersonal connections from prepubescence to the present, inscribed with the incidental details of territorial delineation, sovereignty and land use. Central to these fluctuations is a tension between macro and micro, the experienced and the described. <https://lux.org.uk/work/safos>



Charlotte Prodger, *You Burn Me*, 2019
C-type print

Multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities.

The plane of consistency (grid) is the outside of all multiplicities. The line of flight marks: the reality of a finite number of dimensions that the multiplicity effectively fills; the impossibility of a supplementary dimension, unless the multiplicity is transformed by the line of flight; the possibility and necessity of flattening all of the multiplicities on a single plane of consistency or exteriority, regardless of their number of dimensions.⁸

Reminding us of the complexity of meaning bound up in different languages, Brian Massumi, the translator of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, cites 'flight' (*fuite*) as not only the act of fleeing or eluding but also a flowing, leaking, and disappearing into distance (the vanishing point in a painting is a *point de fuite*).⁹ It has no relation to flying.

8. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1996), 9–10.

9. Brian Massumi, introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (London: The Athlone Press, 1996), xvi.

We are in the dimension of a book, Assyria is displaced in as much as these pages from a book are picture plates, old-fashioned, that originate from a public library. The pages are grainy and the photography isn't the sharpest. Medium upon medium. 'A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously for matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations.'¹⁰

Prodger's series consists of eleven images that are all individually titled and include, among others, *Crush Index*, *Fulmars Thrift*, *You Burn Me*, *Deep Sound Lady*, *I have of Girls*. Each photograph shows a page from a book on Assyrian reliefs taped to a grey cutting board. There are also mini Post-it stickers, the tape and stickers inhabit the colour range of stationary intended for colour coding and to be visible like highlighting pens – the recognisable schema. The borrowed schema also nods at a politics: gay pink, the yellow of labour, acid green, visibility. I have to admit I find it hard to ignore my memory of Iris, our photographic developer at the lab, every inch as idiosyncratic as the rest of us. Working with Prodger we scrutinise test prints of colour cast swaying this way or that. The beauty and frustration of an analogue process beholden to its conditions. A material analysis, an assessment of what we think we see.

There is a new limit, a limit of the cutting board, a domesticated space, but one of action, and inferred violence. But also construction, construction of the image and the making insinuated by the board – somehow I have in mind a grid also used in quilting. Scale and format collide. The works can be read as a meta-frame or prosthesis. I think about the attention surrounding the iPhone footage of her single-channel video *BRIDGIT* (2016) and Prodger's interest at the time in the phone as prosthesis. The Assyrians were also thinking about this in their portrayal of lion slaying where cage and animal almost appear attached. One thing bleeding into another, a foretelling of the cyborg age.

Instead of the emblematic qualities of the square within the page, and then within the frame of the depicted image – we are left with the emblematic qualities of the cutting board and the grid,

10. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1996), 3.

pulling us towards a discourse of twentieth-century painting and the relationship to the photographic image that loops us back around to the slippages of the frame and interplay with the grid. And then Bersani and Dutoit in 1979 somehow being able to connect the then and now, the mobility with which Prodger employs these images as a backdrop to say something about the here; the image made from another time, above and fully frontal, imposed upon with words that also demarcate a flux across registers:

By devaluing the content of any one scene of violence, the Assyrian sculptors train us to formalize psychic mobility. Mobility becomes a response to formal stimuli rather than a movement of identification with the narrative content of any representation. Nothing could be more antagonistic to the narrativising of violence which has characterised Western humanist culture.¹¹



LIMIT

Speaking words
internal
intemperance
the limit of language
can we feel
further than we can
speak
some philosophy says no
that would mean
that held
to Wittgenstein's
account
we are reduced
to
a set of
processes
held in check
balanced by

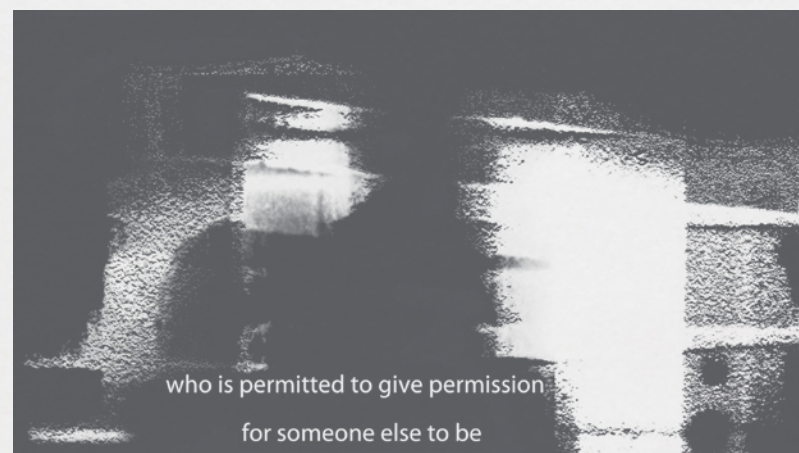
11. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, 'The Forms of Violence', MIT Press, accessed 13 February 2000, <https://fadingtheaesthetic.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/bersani-forms.pdf>

books and or speech
 but never
 extended
 disappointingly reducible
 the form
 of our mind
 fed
 by
 the increasing
 algorithm
 that determines
 emotion
 and yes
 the answer is yes
 there can be
 an algorithm
 of love
 that will replace
 the subliminal
 messaging system
 making us perfect
 and devoid
 mistakes
 will no
 longer
 bother you



REFERENCE 4: STRUCTURE, CONFLICT AND WAR

Ambiguous Journeys (2018) by Lis Rhodes. Timecode: 23.51 – ‘She leans against the word it leans on her’. Rhodes’s words come just after the halfway point. Interlaced with footage that combines the imagery of the newsreel and digitalised stretched 16 mm black and white film – Rhodes’s trademark hand-made film. The narrative is dense and dark. We hear Rhodes’s voice and we read the words, a transcript appearing as white words across the screen are spoken, or nearly all. Rhodes takes us through the brutality of the neoliberal economy, where inequality and lack of identity papers expunge you from a system, a state, a chance of employment, security and a life. For the stateless there is no protection but constant exploitation. The global economy depends on a matrix of vulnerable labour; sexual exploitation runs parallel to all of these. Horrific examples of violence, displacement, and unaccountability are interspersed with Rhodes’s reflections, where leaning on words gulps air into the material, as much as the digitised presencing of a material process (hand-made 16 mm film) forms a space for the placement of displacement. Rhodes is affecting a doubling; creating territory that has existed in the world, and a digital landscape where concept is denuded in favour of narrative content and the poetics of reflection. This work is a demand for action, a wakeup call – the appropriation of her own filmic language, stretching it – cause and effect. Rhodes asks that we see, asks that we listen. The soundtrack is a material process of gathering single notes and groupings of notes that Rhodes has played on a synthesizer alongside online sounds to



Lis Rhodes, *Ambiguous Journeys*, 2018
 HD video. Courtesy the artist and LUX, London

compose the soundtrack using Logic Pro.¹² She then individually stretched notes to reciprocate the stretching of the images. Rhodes is a compassionate thinker. I say that not as some kind of salve, but because the work is trying to address a complicated space between the acts of thinking and writing and the realness of the social-political conditions in which we find ourselves. She sees the interconnectivity across all environments, including the rights and functions of experimentation and the social role of the artist. 'Ideas are not exempt from sale. Thinking is conditional', she reflects when thinking about academic research.¹³ All structure is intertwined in a discordant mess, her experimental and radical film making are brought into an interplay with the political – she wishes to stretch her connection to people and communities far away. In terrain where consideration is essential, where one might identify and empathise with struggle without a concretised connection; a grey in-between in speaking up for people we have not met is often now encountered with a well-versed rebuttal. It is a rebuttal accompanied by the protection of entitlement, the fear of exposure and the suspicion that if you speak out it undermines something else near and beholden. This is how the self-policing of capitalist structures rules; as water always finds a way through a building, the leakage from neoliberalism has swamped all of us. Like Rhodes, Franco Berardi desperately tries to identify a space where signification can occur beyond the capitalist and technological frame. Invoking Macbeth's famous soliloquy:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing

Berardi is also despairing in his analysis. Only the poetic holds out hope, existing beyond the structured narratives that can be absorbed and consumed by techno-capitalism.

12. The soundtrack was mixed by Mick Ritchie.

13. Lis Rhodes, *Telling Invents Told* (London: The Visible Press, 2019), 297.

As I sit in my corner drafting this text, I'm looking out; the window and a wintered birch trailing bearded lichen. This lichen is sensitive to air pollution; there must be something here about my clean air conditions. It makes me think of the rich flocking to the mountains in Switzerland for 'champagne air'. I'm nowhere near Switzerland or anybody rich as I write. This thought meets a panoramic sweep of my room that shows:

*Desk lamp
 Wall
 Arm chair
 Cupboard*

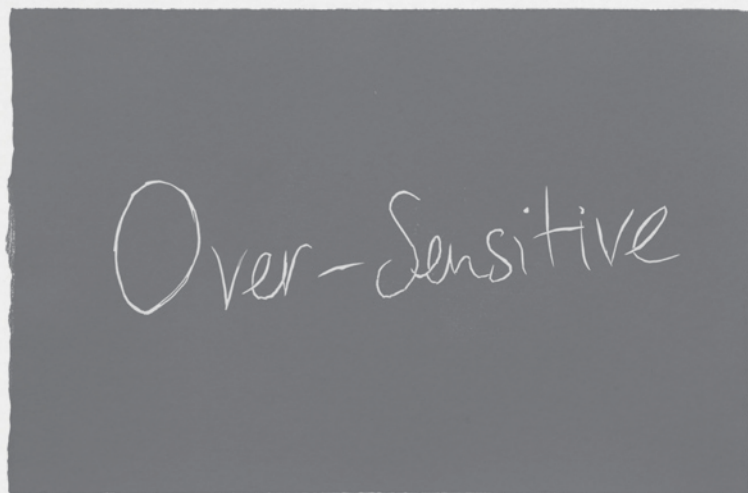
All these elements that constitute the domestic space I now inhabit, have another life, another form of representation. This room is also a stage and these objects have parts in Helen Cammock's video There is a Hole in the Sky Part Two: Listening to James Baldwin (2016). I'm thinking about this as I think about the space of interiority in process, the idea of the frame of time, the fixedness of certain moments, what is true and what is not. There is a storm brewing outside and it is playing havoc with my fire.

REFERENCE 5: THE WORD/S

Light touch
 Disconnect
 Boredom
 Contemporary
 Over-sensitive
 De-sensitised

A line of grey linoleum prints, hand-scoured words. The prints are hand-printed and hang simply, attached with a pin and some acid-free tape. They are not large and could be pages from a book. I remember their first showing at the gallery in the exhibition 'Carte de Visite', curated by Lubaina Himid. That was at the end of 2015, just under four and a half years before this exhibition will take place. The authority with which they speak, the drag between then and now has changed, that isn't because the work has adjusted,

it's because the world has changed around them, and around Cammock, herself. I'm thinking about this, because who speaks and how, and who is listened to, is very much part of her work. It would be almost absurd to dismiss the relationship between her voice and the projected hand-scoured prints we are talking about. I utter these words out loud and hear not only Cammock's own, but the chorus of and echos of intonation – the sound unfolding the perspicacity of the speaker. How to speak on behalf of a word, that is already language, speaking for itself? That would assume a level of self-reflexivity, an understanding. Knowledge. It would assume a level of empathy and connectivity.



Helen Cammock, *Over-Sensitive*, 2015
Linocut print

Cammock uses words to ask of us, to summon us; to ask us to address the use of 'words' as constructs. Words have power she says, words are loaded, layered, explosive and weaponised against individuals and groups of peoples through the tropes proffered by stereotypes and assumptions. They also caress, hold and champion. Cammock isn't asking us to identify violence, she is asking us to think about microaggression, the codes and signs that tell you you don't belong. About deeply embedded layers of control. I perceive the word 'didactic' as one of these words, that comes in and out of view – depending on the fashion – it can be used as a tool to belittle, to prod and make you consider your lack of poetry or formal largesse. I think about this word as it was used years ago as a critique against Cammock herself. Again, I include this anecdote because we might consider who has the right

to be seen as conceptual, poetic and challenging. This is also routed through language, through subject position and through circumstance. I think about the print *Boredom* (2015) and how this is one of those words whose intonation shifts depending on the user. The French for boredom, *ennui*, has an existential quality to it, a poetic listlessness or haplessness that is at worst time-consuming, but seen as an artistically productive state. Cammock is using the word 'boredom' to ask that her subject position not be defined or written off with boredom merely because it might not be understood or might not mirror the dominant producers of culture that holds sway. *Light touch* (2015) does a similar thing, a dismissal, a critical mode used to minimise, assert, occupy an overarching space of entitlement. Think of the phrase 'over-sensitive' – it is most often (although not exclusively) associated with women, Black people, anyone society condenses into an acronym who are often dismissed this way when asserting themselves or rebutting comments, or presenting a response of sorts to a phrase, action or event. Whilst writing this, while I know their making was intended to lean us in this direction, I also reflect that the first line of address isn't about the hand-drawn writing that had to be made backwards to create the mirrored image, an awkwardness that says I am here. This reminds me of visiting iconic art works, you often see the trace of a trembling hand, pencil marks, tape not mechanically clean.

The poetic potential of the individual who made them is first valorised through the politics of semiotics. This is something that Baldwin, a constant whisper in Cammock's ear and a subject of one of her early works, was acutely working from within:

One writes out of one thing only – one's own experience. Everything depends on how relentlessly one forces from this experience the last drop, sweet or bitter, it can possibly give. This is the only real concern of the artist, to recreate out of the disorder of life that order which is art.¹⁴

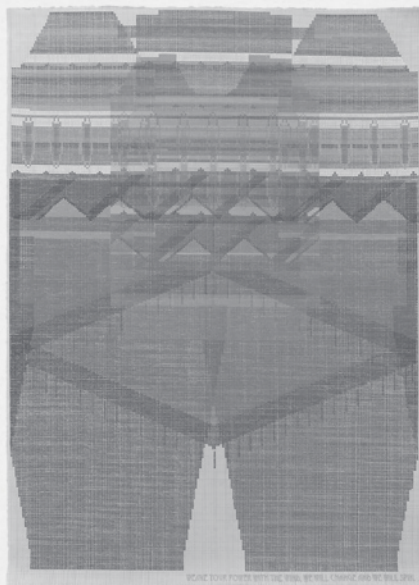
Cammock says the skin of Baldwin's fingers strokes her psyche and the staccato of his insistence will never leave her ears. His *fire within* is her fuel and the colour of ash is always grey but somehow the red embers re-ignite, re-ignite, re-ignite and un-quelled as the words continue to come – heard perhaps only by those prepared to listen in the grey dust of carbon.

14. James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (New York: Bantam Books, 1964) 4–5.

REFERENCE 6: ENCODING

Discursive 'knowledge' is the product not of the transparent representation of the 'real' in language but of the articulation of language on real relations and conditions. Thus there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code. Iconic signs are therefore coded signs too – even if the codes here work differently from those of other signs. There is no degree zero in language. Naturalism and realism – apparent fidelity of the representation to the thing or concept represented – is the result, the effect, of a certain specific articulation of language on the 'real'. It is the result of a discursive practice.¹⁵

Ellen Lesperance, *Weave your power with the wind. We will change and we will spin*, 2019
Gouache and graphite
on tea-stained paper



XOXO (2019) is a painting by Ellen Lesperance. The paintings are code, no they are not code, they are encoded representations of the body. The source for these paintings are knitting designs, patterns that Lesperance has taken from photographs of feminist protest garments worn by women in Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp. The original images are often in black and white, whilst

15. Stuart Hall, "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse", University of Birmingham, accessed 27 October 2019, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/history/cccs/stencilled-occasional-papers/1to8and11to24and38to48/SOPo7.pdf>.

her paintings are not. She has performed an act of translation, using American Symbolcraft, the American language of knitting pattern, a graphic representation of the body rendered through small squares of colour. At the back of her new book *Velvet Fist* (2020) Lesperance provides a key for the symbols staged in her paintings. XOXO perhaps recognisably denotes hugs and kisses; the X visually displays a connection point, the O an enveloping circle. The repeating XO is commonplace in written communication, it is also a popular motif in Fair Isle Knitting. The entanglement of language and love, pigment and wool – the bond of community between women. XOXO is rendered in a grid of purples, oranges and shades of greys and blues. I look up the source image and consider the greyscale of the image, taken sometime in the 1980s – the colour scheme a fantasy, an educated guess.

Protest and survive is a phrase so familiar from the height of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the peace camp, somehow relegated during the centrist neoliberal realignment that followed the Reagan-Thatcher alliance. The phrase has been excavated, words emptied, their meaning somehow passed – until.

Today, these words are reactivated but under a different kind of pressure. It is a pressure I sense in these paintings. The paintings are beautiful and of a feminist craft. They are a retort to the emptying out of protest, they stand for the absolute *necessity* of speaking out, an embodiment of a moment. Their moment has been encoded over a duration, decades. These patterns and their bodies have not been reactivated, their in-the-not-so-distant-past-ness has lent them a discursiveness that has become sited across communities, protests and geography. Within a lifeline, I remember visiting Greenham Common as a 13-year-old with my mother, I wish I had noted the patterns and prevalence of knitwear, I remember being resistant to going, but equally impressed and scared by the women, the power of what they stood for. I was a CND supporter. I remember the story of Helen Thomas, her early death at the hands of a police vehicle was the only death sustained during the camp. Memory collides with facts read and retold. The body remains at the forefront of battle. It continues to be traded and damaged in every possible way. By turning these jumpers into painted knitting patterns, Lesperance isn't working on an act of remembrance, she is tapping into a culture that remains active, the haptic nature of the garment a reification for this entanglement; slipstitched decoding of moments and vestigial bodies. An alternative archive of lived experience; felt, inhabited and worn.

REFERENCE 7: TRIANGULATION

A lioness whose presence is at the heart of a search. Silver cat heads wearing cherry earrings interrelating on car jacks. Charcoal drawings of a cheetah and a lion. Medium to medium we take lines of flight. Random acts of connection create vectors of thought, in a holding pattern of logic that bounce off each other – I think about infinite variation and possibility, and about these artists who share everything and nothing; the rhizome pushing into the contingent exigency of the shared body. I'm back again with the Assyrian reliefs and the 'spear as arm as cage', a line that connects the outer edges and slippages. I'm back as well with the cutting board, with the infinite reproducibility of the square. The cutting act on a piece of linoleum, the drawings as studies for ceramic animals in a time dissolved from now, and the ceramic promise of the moat of cherries in Liliana Moro's sculpture *Ouverture* (2017).

Ghosted space, between plank and wall; the corner – divided by wall and floor. Evocation, and memory repeat, and align. We know what was there and fear what we see. The psychology of omission is traceable, and sensed. Our peripheral vision on constant; finding, archiving and understanding, the rumble of the subconscious glimpsed – the smell straining to reach our nostrils through an impaired sense of a collective register of time.

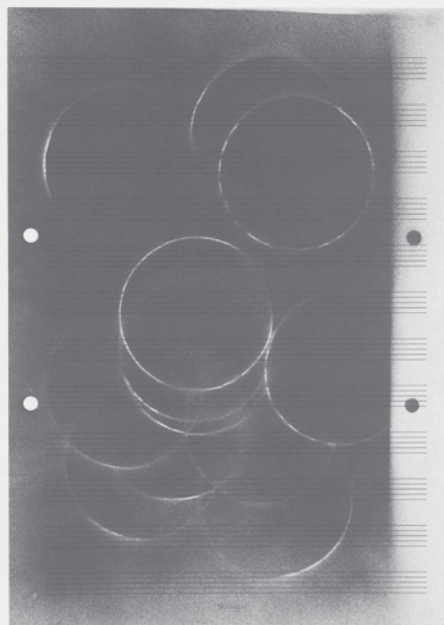


Helen Cammock, *Changing Room*, 2014
HD video

Transmission from one generation to another, two charcoal drawings on paper of cats; a lion and a cheetah. These are sketches for ceramics. The ceramics are visible in Cammock's video work *Changing Room* (2014). This video is a personal exploration of the politics of who gets to be seen as an artist and why. The subject is the artist's father, George Cammock, a Cuban-Jamaican man who first came to the UK during WWII and later became British, having a family and working as an art teacher in schools in Wolverhampton and later London. He always made ceramics; vessels and animals were particular emphases. His drawings are part of an installation called *And There Is Something About A Mountain*, a title that acknowledges his daily journey to school that he took on foot over a mountain in his childhood Jamaica. The video work is in part a memorial to George, but is also a complex letter about his fight for justice, which he served by working as a magistrate in his spare time, acutely aware of the lack of impartiality met by Black people in the courts in the 1960s and 70s. This is also about a relationship to his daughter. The work is about the harm that racism and colonialism has brought to an individual's psyche, and in part how the damage this does is generational and multifaceted. It is a brave and moving work that uses George's hand-cast homemade ceramic objects as signifiers and avatars for the logic of wider social structures. Filtered through the language of Franz Fanon, Walter Benjamin, and Cammock herself, the voiceover asks questions and probes memory. The haptic nature of the work is dramatised via the hand-made ceramics, the family portrait, and the coming realisation we are in a home whose status is somewhere between lived and left. The charcoal drawings of the lion and cheetah, shown alongside one of George's books entitled *How to Make Pottery and Ceramic Sculpture*, published by MOMA in the 1950s, indicating an awareness of what he wanted to be. The pain of her father and that of Cammock herself dwell just beneath the epidermis of the filmic language, the body is made present through its absence, but like her linocut texts there are moments of irreducible bodily trace; the cheetah caught outdoors with the marking of fingers in the clay, the cheetah in the gallery. Transmission and translation affecting a psychological and physiological manoeuvre.

REFERENCE 8:
SPRAY

Spray gland
Spray Paint
Pchit
Tape, VHS and Cassette



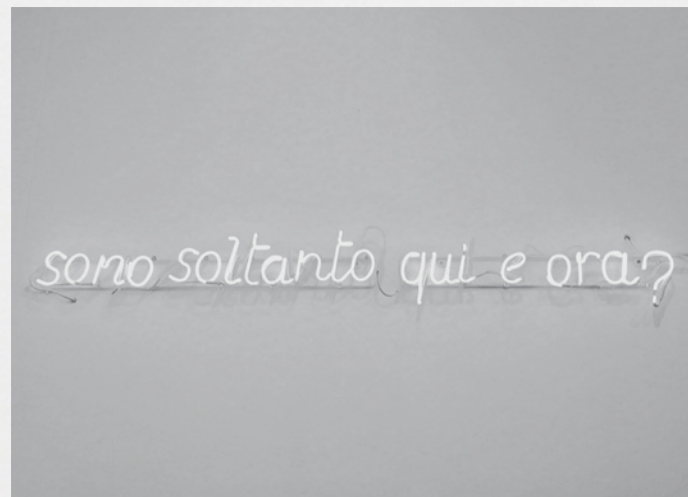
Ruth Proctor, *Untitled*, 2006
Spray paint on manuscript paper

A video cassette (VHS) placed on manuscript paper, some circles and audio cassette. Ruth Proctor has taken a can of black spray paint and covered the objects creating a negative, a representation of the thing through its absence. This is a material act, an image has been created, in a mode reminiscent of exposing film paper to light or using the material itself in experimental film works. These are works that are about action, but also about registration. These are works that are about time, and what is at hand – a readymade-ness to them, and there is an absence of mark-making, but there is the figure of the artist and her hand holding the can of spray paint. This action leaves traces by leaving – her presence a vanishing act. It is no coincidence that Proctor is interested in magic and the visual connections and tricks of fast culture. She appropriates them and discards them with equal disdain and pleasure. The performance of making is for Proctor in the line of a set of experiments. These often involve a form of discomfort; exposure to toxins, using herself as a body double, long

and arduous journeys, using herself as spectacle, using her body as material, her life and transient life style as subject matter. The idea of ephemerality has been well mined, but in Proctor's case she is hardly there – for part of her action is also about her own absence and lack of disclosure. These drawings mediate sound and image; the materialisation of the object – objectifying – making sculptural, but making it drawn. Painted 'outside of themselves' these bearers of sound and image are mini monuments to the analogue age, their funereal-esque-ness a banishment of the past, a pchit pchit pchit – an act of drawing a legacy to a close. I think of the time before when Proctor made 16 mm film. Beautiful material acts of hidden observation. These drawings, the more I tunnel into them, the more I see their contiguity rubbing into the weight of history; for Proctor the tension between being free and being held.



There could be no apter evocation of the disquiet that marks the beginning of any critique of history worthy to be called dialectical, which must renounce a calm, contemplative attitude towards its subjects to become aware of the critical constellation in which precisely this fragment of the past is found with precisely this present.¹⁶



Liliana Moro, *Sono soltanto qui e ora?*, 2020
Neon on metal support. Courtesy the artist and
Francesco Pantaleone Arte Contemporanea, Milan

16. Water Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*
(London: Verso, 1997) 351.

REFERENCE 9:
LIFE

Sono soltanto qui e ora? [I am here at this moment in time?] (2020) is a neon work by Liliana Moro. We can leave it there, hovering, evoking, speaking. The utterance colluding with the desiring machine, the body without organs, the mind held open and mutable. It is both a question and a provocation that speaks itself no render nor aggrandisement needed.

Ouverture is an opening – for me – for us.



Liliana Moro, *Ouverture*, 2017
Melting tin, industrial jack, ceramic. Courtesy the artist and
Francesco Pantaleone Arte Contemporanea, Milan

I'm back in Scilly and the abundance of ceramic fruit. Larger and glossier than life, I force myself not to bundle these objects into my rucksack – the curb-side seduction a collective malady.

The sculpture seems rooted in traditions of sorts. The car jacks act as plinths for two cat heads, one looking up at another. I know Moro is from Palermo and it brings to mind the use of animals in public sculpture within the city, but this is a false start, I am reaching and looking for clues. I find out that Moro loves cats, and that for her cats speak of the intimacy of relationships. The sculpture also connects to the tradition of still life and games we play as children (earrings as cherries). I find out that Pasolini's 1963 film *La Ricotta* is important to the artist, a searing critique of Italian society played out in a film set of the Passion of Christ. A meta game – Orson Welles becomes a stand-in for Pasolini, the last supper becomes the death knell of an impoverished extra who dies on the cross.

'Kitty' and 'catty' are words in English that are particularly gendered. Cats are also assumed to be independent and selfish and non-compliant. Today a dance teacher posts on instagram, 'Bring a feline quality to your dancing', and asks, 'How do you feel about that?'

Research shows it was cats that sought to be domesticated by humans, not the other way around. So cats are clever, ensuring shelter and food could be attained beyond the wild. Cats in other words are used to evoke a myriad of things; from the political to the resourceful, an amalgam of sorts set up as a metaphor for an intertextual play from which to explore the ambulatory convergence of sense, rhythm and meaning. Cats understand power, how to invoke it, how to recognise it and how to utilise it.

Moro sets up a communication system – economical relationships are created between idea and form – Moro doesn't busy this in-between-ness. Like a poem, the sparseness creates echoes – the mind drifts, attaches, comes back and deviates into something else. The process is one of subtraction, until her balance is achieved.

I'm drawn to that space – the summons of the possibility;
the kindred,
the urgency with which it is all felt;
and which we pressingly need.

A night spent in watching
A night spent in watching
Night
A halfwing of thought lifted
And drifted
Out
Thought in answer to awareness
Of thought in awareness
Of night
She is the sphinx with stretched eyes
And the coiledblue of her hair flies
At the moon
The weight of her lips pressed and pressed
On the heads o fate blessed
Halfdead
She speaks and her words are the mumblings
Of the infinite to the jumblings
Of the dead
She's is deepbossemed sheet watching
With green eyes
The sun with green eyes watching the
The night
The dark trees shiver at the paleness
Of the deadawake pressed in frailness
Out
And they grow hushed within themselves

Joan Murray



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